

25 INCOME STREAMS



**FOR INDIE ARTISTS
AND PRODUCERS**

Phil David

25 INCOME STREAMS FOR INDIE ARTISTS AND PRODUCERS

INTRODUCTION

MULTIPLE MUSIC INCOME STREAMS

One of the best ways for independent music creators to profit off of their music is through sync licensing. Video content dominates every corner of modern media and entertainment, from Netflix to Disney+ to video games, film, advertising, trailers and monetized content across the internet.

The ever-expanding media landscape provides more and more opportunities for indie artists, songwriters and producers to land sync placements, increasing both exposure and income through music licensing.

Not every stream of income in this guide is sync related, but once you see and understand the landscape of how music generates income, you'll understand why a sync strategy makes sense. You'll also understand how royalties can compound when you've got your songs registered in the right places, while those songs are out there in different markets, working for you while you sleep.

You can't and shouldn't try to pursue every income source contained in this guide. You would be stretched way too thin with time and energy, and probably wouldn't have much time to create great music. Instead, use the information in these pages to craft your music career strategy and make sure you aren't missing out on any royalties due to you from past work.

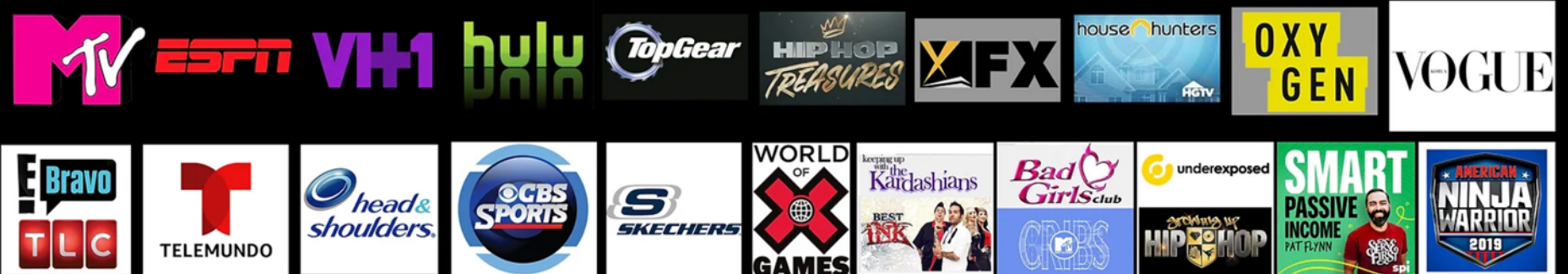
All songs have potential to earn income if they find the right markets. Dealing with admin and registering songs can feel like pulling teeth at times, but it is a necessary evil. Getting paid for your music is sexy, and the confidence/validation from it can lead you to bigger and better opportunities instead of complaining how unfair things are for independent artists. Things *are* unfair, but complaining won't fix it. Registering your songs in the right places and crafting a great sync strategy just might.

Read on to discover 25 income streams for indie artists and producers in 2025. *No AI was used to write this guide.*

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MEET YOUR INSTRUCTOR

PHIL DAVID | FOUNDER OF SYNC NINJAS



Thank you checking out this guide and for trusting me to help you navigate the ever-changing landscape of sync licensing.

I'm Phil David, a producer, songwriter, drummer, and sync coach. I was teaching at the college level in USA and South Korea for 10+ years, at the same time building up my production skills and music business acumen. I signed my first sync deal in 2009, but it wasn't until 2016 that I left teaching to transition into a full-time, nomadic sync producer.

I encountered numerous ups and downs along the way, but several years and hundreds of TV placements later, I'm still here doing what I love - making music on my terms and living where I want to live, supported by music royalties.

I believe my experience and background as a producer, artist and teacher puts me in position to fast track your sync career with my sync coaching services, tools and educational content. I've helped over 100 clients break into sync licensing, and I hope you are next!

Phil David

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#1

DIGITAL DISTRO SPOTIFY, APPLE MUSIC & OTHERS

Let's get this one out of the way. The most obvious and easiest way to create an income stream from music is to distribute your songs to the digital music platforms. Of course, this is also the worst-paying model for music royalties, and it isn't getting any easier or friendlier for independent music creators.

Spotify has stopped paying any royalties for songs that don't reach 1,000 streams in a one-year period, and they've introduced new bundled tiers that reduce the songwriter's royalty rate even more.

Sadly, Spotify is also being flooded with AI music that is taking away editorial playlist opportunities from humans trying to make a living from their music. Even worse, some distributors are now including distributed songs in AI training and "mashup" features without your (the creator's) consent.

It's a very difficult position because despite all this, Spotify is still an official barometer for music industry success and perceived traction as an artist. Even though 99.9% of playlist promotion companies use bots and streaming numbers can be artificially inflated easily.

I highly recommend staying far away from all of these bogus promo companies. Not only do the streams drop off as soon as the promo ends (bots), but it also KILLS your favorability with the algorithm because:

Bots don't save your song. Bots don't add your song to playlists. Bots only stream for 30 seconds and skip to the next song. Bots don't re-stream your song. All of these actions from bot streams tell the algorithm that your music fucking sucks, even if it doesn't.

And, if your distro catches it they can take down your music without chance for appeal.

However! You gotta get your music out there, it needs to be findable. And you want your sync success to trickle down and turn into extra streaming income. Sync placements translate to free, organic fan acquisition.

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WHICH DISTRIBUTOR IS BEST?

IT'S DEFINITELY NOT DISTROKID

There are a lot of different distributors, and all of them will get your music on Spotify, but not all are created equal. You should choose a distributor based on your needs, and there are several pricing models to choose from. For a detailed and mostly unbiased comparison of the biggest distro companies, I recommend a Google search for "Ari's Take Best Distribution Companies 2025".

I've used many distributors over the years, and you are always free to change distributors or use different distro companies for different projects. Here are my top choices, and why:

AMUSE

I've been using Amuse.io for several years and recently migrated the majority of my catalogue over to their platform. They don't distribute to as many companies as Distrokid, but they get all of the important ones. Their support has ranged from great to decent over the years. I like that with one yearly subscription price, I can release unlimited music under multiple artists, which covers all my different sync monikers. They recently ditched their free tier, which raises concern that music will be removed from all platforms if the subscription ends. Overall they are a B+ and have never given me problems.

CDBaby

I distributed my first album with CDBaby in 2015, and the only thing I don't like about their company is the pay-per-release pricing model. For a beatmaker who creates 100+ beats per year and has a distro/CID strategy in place, it would be too costly to pay a fee for every single release. Beware of other companies (cough *Distrokid*) who try to upsell you at every turn, per release, in addition to subscription charges.

UNITED MASTERS

Real talk: In 2025, customer support quality seems to be in decline across the board. United Masters is no exception; their support is not good. But of all the other distro companies, United Masters does seem to have really good sync industry connections. I would never rely on a distro company as a main source of sync placements, but as a cherry on top of a functional distribution service...it might be worth trying if you have super 'syncable' music.

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#2

DIRECT TO FAN SALES

VIA BANDCAMP OR YOUR OWN WEBSITE

Why wouldn't you sell your music on Bandcamp? Seriously though...it's free. Set your prices low and let fans pay more if they want (you'd be surprised how many of your supporters will). Merch tools and bonus uploads let your reward superfans with exclusive content. Bandcamp contains a market of music enthusiasts who still pay for music the (semi) old-school way. Kind of like the people who refused to give up their 45s when cassette tapes and CDs came out.

A lot of DJs scour Bandcamp for undiscovered music to use in their sets. Bandcamp is especially valuable to artists who may not have a bunch of distributed music and don't distribute regularly or upload to YouTube or Soundcloud. Um...how are fans gonna listen to you??



They also hold "Bandcamp Fridays" every couple months where they waive their sales fee for an entire day and let artists keep 100% of sales (instead of 85%).

Of course, with direct to consumer sales, you can also make your music available on your website. Just remember you'll need to drive traffic there somehow. For an alternative to Bandcamp, check out EVEN (Even.biz).

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#3

SYNC COMPANIES

MUSIC PUBLISHERS & SYNC AGENTS

Sync companies may refer to themselves by different names, such as **Music Publisher, Sync Agency, Music Library, Sync Label or Music Supervision Company**. Most of these companies are very similar but may operate with slight differences in business model, but all have their hand in the sync jar one way or another.

Music Publishers and Sync Agents, specifically, tend to work with indie artists (and producers) who make authentic music and have an established brand supporting their music. Home studio composers, you're likely to gravitate more toward PMLs, which is next on this list.

Deal points will vary slightly from company to company, but the most common split you'll find is 50/50 on up front fees, and 50/50 on the backend (you keep 100% of writer's share, they take 100% of publisher's share). They get paid when you get paid. Industry standard and fair.

Companies may work on an exclusive or non-exclusive basis. Signing tracks over exclusively raises the value of those songs because there is only one place to license them. Big brands don't want to use non-exclusive tracks that may be overused and undervalued. Imagine paying \$10k to license a song and then finding the same track for \$29 on Pond5...

So don't be surprised if you link with a publisher and they want exclusivity on specific tracks. A non-exclusive strategy can still work, but you need a lot of tracks in a lot of places (which also means more admin work).

The best strategy, in my opinion, is to have multiple legit publishers exclusively repping your music for sync. It may involve strategic collabs or creating pitch-ready albums of music for exclusive libraries. This casts a much wider net than attaching your entire library to one company and expecting all results to come from one place. There will be peaks and valleys. Spread your tracks around.

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PMLS

PRODUCTION MUSIC LIBRARIES

I put **production music libraries** in its own category because the deals and business models are slightly different, and your strategy will be too.

Many production music libraries are subsidiary labels of the PML big dogs like BMG, Universal Production Music, 5 Alarm, Warner Chappell PM, etc. These PMLs, also referred to as Sync Labels, are often independent in operation yet more exposed to the top notch clients and sync placements provided by affiliation with the big dogs.

Signing and releasing music through these labels is often a great move for your sync career. Keep in mind though, most sync labels acquire the full copyright to the tracks and control all aspects of the release (artwork, release date, etc.). This model tends to align more with home studio composers than it does with artists who actively perform and promote their work.

One nice perk that sometimes comes with PMLs is up-front money in the form of a 'master buy-out'. Basically, they pay you a fee to acquire the tracks and you forfeit any future up-front sync fees (but you still collect backend royalties on placements). This can be a wonderful thing when you consider that most music you make for sync won't start earning income for a year or two, sometimes longer!

This is why education and research is so important in this industry. The best deal for someone else may not be the best deal for you. Understanding the key differences between sync companies and the deals they offer will help you make better decisions on who to target and align with. Establishing your goals and having a clearly thought out plan that you follow and execute is equally important.

It's tempting to send your music out EVERYWHERE to then latch on to the first companies that show interest. Resist this temptation! Make smart, informed moves that you won't regret later. The only thing worse than an unfinished song on your hard drive is a finished one that is lost and forgotten in a dead-end sync deal.

Research & Diversify!

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#5

PROs

PERFORMING RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS BACKEND PERFORMANCE ROYALTIES

This is always the first chapter of Sync 101: sign up as a songwriter with a PRO (Performing Rights Organization). Backend performance royalties are paid out by your PRO and are a crucial component to building long-term wealth through sync.

If you are from the United States, you can choose between BMI, ASCAP and SESAC as your PRO. Otherwise, your country will have a designated PRO for you to join. You'll get an IPI number, which is included on cue sheets for sync placements, linking you to your work and ensuring you get paid those backend royalties when your music is used in TV broadcasts (it takes around 9-12 months after airing to collect and pay out backend royalties).

You can use a site like [Tunesat](#) to track and screen your songs for TV usage in the US and parts of Europe (a free account lets you track 50 songs). Royalty payouts differ depending on the usage and length, as well as when it airs (primetime pays more, as do theme songs).

You can only choose one PRO to sign up with, and switching PROs after registering songs is a huge headache (not an easy process like switching distributors), so make an informed decision when choosing.

I joined BMI 10+ years ago when they were a non-profit and writer sign up was free. They are now for-profit and have a sign up fee, causing many artists to opt for ASCAP instead.

However, I do have concern about ASCAP's system for tracking royalties, which involves census and surveys that could miss song usage if the placement doesn't line up with their data collection samples. That is a very simplified explanation, but worth noting. The only unacceptable move would be to skip signing up with a PRO. It's a must!

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#6

ADMIN PUBLISHING SONGTRUST

Understanding the different types of music royalties can be very confusing, not to mention collecting them! For every song, you've got two sides: the master (the physical recording of the song) and the publishing (the written music and lyrics). On that publishing side, you have the writer's share and the publishing share, which add up to 200%.

Your head might be spinning. Check the resources page for a deeper dive on publishing. It's an important part of any music business and you should understand how it works.

The important thing to know is that if you are *only* signed up with a PRO, you are leaving money on the table and aren't collecting all of the royalties due to you. Once you establish income by distributing and licensing your music, you can collect additional worldwide publishing, mechanical and performance royalties with an **admin publisher like Songtrust**.

To be clear, you are not "giving up" your publishing when you sign up for an admin publisher, you are simply granting them the ability to collect those royalties on your behalf and take a small % cut as an admin fee. As a solo songwriter, a one-time fee allows you to register unlimited compositions.

Songtrust pays out quarterly and you retain 100% ownership of your works. Songtrust also collects and pays out the royalties that the MLC gets from streaming services. You don't need to worry about MLC registration and collection if your songs are registered with Songtrust, but keep in mind their admin fee still applies.

An admin publisher is a no-brainer for your non-exclusive sync tracks. In nearly all cases, if you sign tracks to an exclusive sync deal, that company will manage and register the publishing for those specific tracks.

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#7

THE MLC MECHANICAL LICENSING COLLECTIVE

The MLC was established in 2018 as a result of the Music Modernization Act, a non-profit org whose purpose is to ensure that songwriters, composers and music publishers receive their mechanical royalties from streaming and download services accurately and on-time.

It is free to sign up and register your songs with the MLC, and they may even be able to collect 'blackbox' royalties retroactively for past unmatched works.

The reason I still suggest using Songtrust is because it will collect on behalf of the MLC, saving you time. But more importantly, Songtrust collects both mechanical royalties AND other worldwide performance royalties that your PRO, Distro and MLC won't collect.

#8

SOUNDEXCHANGE PERFORMANCE ROYALTIES FOR SOUND RECORDINGS

Ok, so we've established that the PROs collect public performance royalties, MLC collects mechanical royalties and Songtrust collects worldwide mech & performance royalties. It doesn't stop there. SoundExchange has entered the chat.

The previously mentioned royalties have to do mostly with publishing. SoundExchange collects digital performance royalties **generated by master recordings**. If your music gets played on non-interactive digital platforms like Pandora or SiriusXM, these royalties can be lucrative. It may not make sense to join right away until you establish a catalogue of distributed music.

Filling out the registration spreadsheet for SoundExchange is not fun, but do you want to get paid or not? Business admin can't be glossed over. Keep at least one hour per week of scheduled time to keep your admin and registrations up to date.

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#9.

MICRO SYNC SOCIAL MEDIA USE

As you might guess, in term of sync income, micro sync is relatively small-scale use of music in content on social media platforms like Tik Tok and Instagram. While these uses only pay a fraction of a cent for each use, posts that go even moderately viral can trigger payouts in the hundreds or thousands of dollars.

Another type of micro sync comes from a relatively new model of royalty free music library. For decades, most searchable online music libraries were licensing the tracks in their libraries a la carte, but a new blanket subscription model became popular around 2018, giving content creators access to full libraries and paying the creators on a subscription/royalty sharing model.

Personally, I've seen 5-figure annual paychecks from this model as well as organic fan acquisition through the use of those tracks. On the whole, however, it may be devaluing sync music and making it more difficult for artists to succeed in the traditional sync models.

These sites often have peculiar "rules" so as always, read the agreements thoroughly and do research before joining any sync platform or RF library.

#10.

NEIGHBORING RIGHTS YES, NEIGHBORING RIGHTS

Neighboring Rights seem to be one of the fastest growing sources of music revenue, yet they are not the easiest thing to collect. Royalties generated from neighboring rights go to the master owner and the performing artists when their music is performed or broadcasted on radio, TV, streaming services and new media in public places. This may include live clubs, business and retailers, cable TV channels, and terrestrial radio outside the US.

The United States does not currently recognize neighboring rights. If your music qualifies, a company like **Lime Blue Music** may be able to help you collect neighboring rights royalties. Worth looking into!

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#11

ROYALTY FREE MUSIC LIBRARIES - AL A CARTE LICENSING

Royalty-Free music libraries are not in the top-tier of music income sources, but can be a steady or sporadic source of income generated by your “B-tracks”. I don’t recommend putting your best tracks into RF libraries; their income potential will be limited and you could miss out on much bigger placements with significant up-front sync fees. These opportunities do not come from RF libraries. It is a good idea to **save your best tracks for exclusive deals** with publishers and sync labels.

But for the home studio composer who cranks out tons of instrumental music in various styles, it makes sense to filter some of your unsigned works to various non-exclusive music libraries, many of which will be royalty-free.

Don’t let the term “royalty-free” confuse you; it only means that the licensee doesn’t need to pay recurring royalties to rights holders after the initial licensing fee. When your music is properly registered (PRO, MLC, SoundExchange, Songtrust), you’ll still be collecting performance and mechanical royalties that are generated from use of the songs.

RF libraries usually operate one of two ways: on a blanket subscription model or the old-school a la carte model, where users of the platform search for songs manually and purchase single-use licenses. Good metadata tagging is critical so that users actually find your tracks. RF libraries are much less strict on what they accept compared to exclusive libraries.

If any pocket of the sync industry gets killed by AI music, Royalty Free Music Libraries are the most likely victim. Going down this road only make sense if you have an excess of tracks that can’t be signed exclusively, for whatever reason.

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Music that plays in the background of malls, retail stores and restaurants also earns royalties with every use. It is illegal for retail businesses and public dining establishments to just cue up a Spotify playlist and press play. They have to license the music, which generates public performance royalties.

I collect royalties quarterly from an Italian company called **Soundreef**, which serves a few dozen of my tracks to retail stores all around Europe. This becomes another completely passive income stream once the initial registration and onboarding of your music is completed.

It also opens up new channels of exposure for your music to a global audience. Using your data and analytics, you can see which of your songs is getting played the most and which cities are Shazaming your music the most. You can use that data to run ads targeting your best cities, or just to see what is working to put focus on writing more songs in that style.

Other companies like Pelaton (yes, the exercise company) pay excellent per stream rates for music that plays during their workout videos. You can always reach out directly to companies that need to license music to enhance their business offerings. It pays to think outside the box!

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#13

FREELANCE MARKETPLACES

SOUNDBETTER - FIVERR - AIRGIGS

Hopefully, you have multiple music or music production-related skillsets in your bag, and one or two that you really excel in. Monetizing your top skill(s) on a freelance marketplace like Fiverr or Airgigs is a great way to establish another income stream that can provide consistent monthly income while your long-term music career strategies take shape.

Sync is a long-term music career strategy. I've already mentioned that it can take up to a year for backend royalties to pay out. Not to mention the time it takes to pitch & sign your finished music to publishers, who in turn pitch on your behalf for relevant scenes in upcoming TV shows, ads and movies. That music is needed long before the production airs. So, just be realistic about the timeline here. Some will find sync success faster than others. Stay in the game and make sure you've got short-term income keeping you afloat.

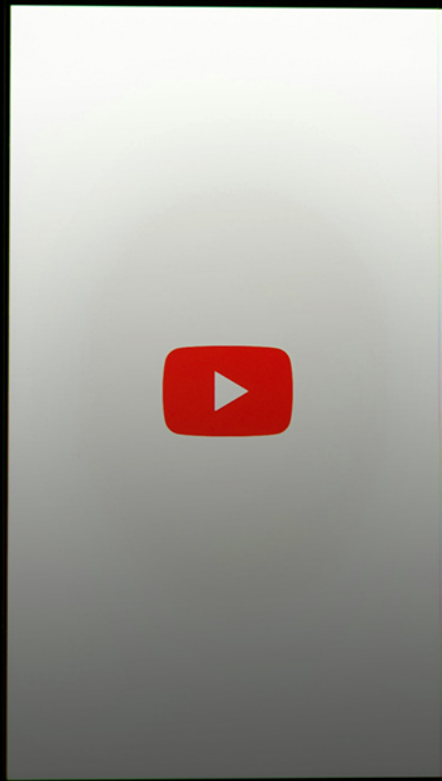
A **freelance marketplace** is one of the best ways to monetize and further develop your top skills while your music library grows. I leaned into composing theme songs for brands and podcasts during covid. And because this was not work-for-hire, I was getting paid up-front to create potential assets. I gave clients the option to purchase an exclusive license (at a much higher price) or opt for a free non-exclusive license, which leaves the rights to the track with me, allowing me to further monetize that asset in libraries, beat stores, direct licenses, etc.

Vocalists can kill it in this space, and so can instrumentalists, ghost writers, drum programmers, or any other music skill where being really freaking good is worth it. **Stick to your best skills, over-deliver on the value you provide, communicate well and be easy to work with.** Don't dilute your services with offerings that are less than stellar. Just because you own iZotope Ozone 11 doesn't mean you should offer mastering services...

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#14



CONTENT ID

YOUTUBE ADREV

If your music is uploaded to YouTube, or if you provide music directly to content creators or through non-exclusive music libraries, then a Content ID administrator like **Identifyy** or **FUGA** (formerly Adrev) might be a good choice for collecting CID income from the use of your music on YouTube.

“Identifyy is HAAWK’s self-service music rights management platform. Identifyy polices, licenses, administers, monetizes, and collects both advertising and subscription revenue generated by UGC videos uploaded to YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Identifyy’s simple sign up and self-service uploader are the perfect solution for independent artists, labels, producers, publishers, songwriters, and composers to start generating royalties from YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram making use of your music.”

Beatmakers - if you are uploading beats to YouTube to lease to artists, you should protect your beats using Content ID Admin. If your beats get a lot of plays, best believe that some rappers are stealing your beats and uploading them to DSPs (with or without vocals), and if they distribute and register Content ID before you do, you’ll get copyright claims on your own beats, on your own YouTube channel. WTF right?

It’s another reason why you should be distributing your instrumental beats to DSPs. It will offer some level of protection since you are the first to generate an ISRC with the beat. Then, you can register those beats with your Content ID admin, and you will collect the adrev on any unauthorized use of your music on YouTube. These detections can also be helpful in locating the offenders, giving you leverage to negotiate since they violated the copyright of your work.

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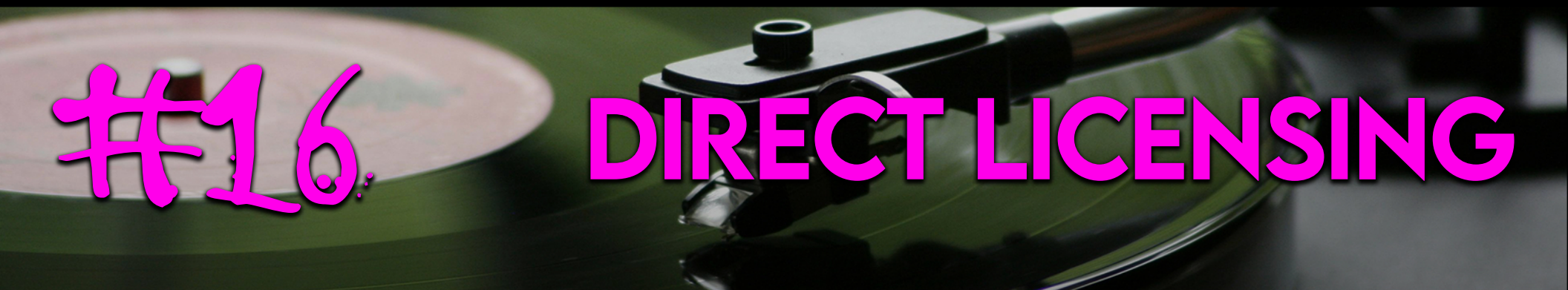
#15

LIVE PERFORMANCE

For many musicians, performing in front of a live audience is the most fun and rewarding way to get paid making music. Depending on where you live, well-paying gigs may be few and far between.

Performing to a live audience is a privilege, right? And it should be enjoyable. Relying on live gigs as your primary source of music income is a risky bet. Play too often and risk burning out your fanbase, or your local venues, or yourself. There is always a time and energy exchange with live shows, not to mention unpaid prep time.

I'm not saying to ignore this income stream. Whether you are a producer booking DJ gigs, a solo artist performing showcases or a full band building a fanbase, just make sure that your live gigs are contributing to your music career in a positive way. You can build mystique and make shows more special by playing out less. Use the in between time to create more songs and build passive income streams that don't require your time and energy every single time.



#16

DIRECT LICENSING

Direct licensing sounds just like what it is...someone needs music and you issue them a license directly. If you are a producer and establish a respectable collection of tracks that you own the rights to, you can package them together and sell a non-exclusive blanket license for the use of that music in their content, ad, podcast, video game or other media project. I issued a blanket license to a mobile app company for a package of tracks for \$1,000 (one-year term, which they also renewed for a second year).

This is why it is important to have some type of existence on social media, YouTube, freelance marketplaces, etc. People will find you, but you have to be "findable". Make sure you have a clearly worded 'Terms of Service' document attached to the license.

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#17

BEAT LEASING SAMPLE PACKS & LOOPMAKERS

More and more sync companies are turning down songs that use leased beats for the instrumental (especially exclusive publishers and music libraries). And for the same reason, they also ask that you don't use 3rd party melodic loops from sites like Splice, Cymatics, Loopcloud and hundreds of others.

The reason is YouTube Content ID. When you sign a sync deal, you provide them the full song with vocals and the instrumental. If that beat was leased to 50 other artists and they all released songs with it, it becomes a publishing nightmare and can cause annoying and costly copyright claims on YouTube.

It may sound like a minor issue, but big brands that pay 5-figures to license a song in their commercial spot will not accept any copyright or clearance issues. It's why they shell out big bucks to sync companies that can provide high-quality, exclusive, fully cleared music tailored to their brand identity.

So, is it hopeless for beatmakers who want to sync their beats?

No! There is hope if you are extremely careful in your strategy.

First, if you use Splice loops, stay away from vocal loops and make sure you manipulate and change melodic loops so that they are unreconizable from the original loop. Change the tempo and key, add fx, and better yet - chop up the loop in Serato Sample and create a new melody with it. Or use a stem separator, extract the midi and recreate the loop in your original style with a different sound. The chances of getting a Content ID claim is slim to none if you do this tactfully. Don't just drop in raw loops! Protect yourself.

Next, stick to a non-exclusive strategy if you make or use leased beats. Non-exclusive companies (especially Royalty Free Libraries) are generally less strict with this stuff. However, some require that they manage Content ID for those tracks, so be careful. It may limit your ability to sell exclusive licenses. Awareness is key.

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#18

PRODUCTION SERVICES

MIXING/MASTERING, TOPLINE VOCALS & GHOST PROD

Freelance production without the middleman (marketplace). You'll need some networking skills and a solid portfolio to start getting regular work in this realm. A social media presence with some nice testimonials won't hurt. Similar to a freelance marketplace, make sure you provide maximum value by focusing on your top skills.

If you are a vocalist and able to write/produce high-quality vocals from your home studio, you can either a) provide vocals/lyrics on a work-for-hire basis and charge higher upfront fees, or b) provide vocals to sync producers and songwriters for a percentage of the song. Producers can do the same thing with instrumentals. If your studio setup is nice enough, book out time and engineer sessions for other artists.

IMPORTANT SIDE NOTE

Make sure you have documentation of whatever kind of agreement you've worked out with collaborators. Signed split sheets, or a documented work-for-hire agreement is a must to save you from future headaches and royalty disputes. If an engineer/producer made creative contributions to a song you hired them to work on, they could have a case to claim a percentage of your royalties. Don't leave that session without a signed WFH agreement and stems of the entire DAW session.

In terms of collabs, it's best to hash this stuff out during the studio session while everyone is present and memory is fresh as far as who contributed what to the song. The easiest thing to do is equal splits for all collaborators, regardless of who contributed the most. Not every case calls for equal splits, but I don't recommend arguing over percentage points. It's a great way to kill the collab vibes and make collaborators think twice before calling you back next time.

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#19.

TEACH/COACH

PRODUCTION / PERFORMANCE/
MUSIC BIZ / MARKETING

Once you've spent a number of years building your music skills, perfecting one or more crafts, trying and failing, trying again and winning, repeating that process and living everyday as a "student of the game" with a genuine thirst for knowledge in your field, you may then be able to outsource your top skill(s) into another stream of income via students and coaching clients.

If you have a mastery of a particular instrument, whether its guitar, piano, drums, your voice, or something else, you should be able to find some locals to teach, and then when you have some experience and happy students/testimonials, expand to online lessons. 1-on-1 coaching time is a high value offer if you have the skills and expertise to back it up. You also have to be able to, you know, TEACH. Effective communication is paramount.

When I became a sync coach, I already had a decade of experience teaching at the college level. I was able to translate those skills, along with my growing experience and knowledge of sync licensing into a legit service that helps indie artists and producers sign sync deals. There are plenty of "sync influencers" on IG who try to turn a few placements into gatekept "opportunities" for new artists desperate to break into sync. If it involves a submission fee or subscription to submit, it's snake oil. Don't fall for these clowns.

If your expertise is production-related, you'll likely need to use social media to provide proof of your skills and attract clients. You might need to start out with a few free mixes or discount rates to get the ball rolling. This is a great avenue for connecting with artists and establishing relationships that can develop over time. I've had mixing and coaching clients turn into sync collabs.

If you go this route, you'll need skills that pay the bills. Results for the client must justify the higher price tag for 1-on-1 access to you. Freebie-seekers will scour YouTube for surface level training and tips, but there are plenty of people out there willing to pay top dollar for personalized, expert instruction on highly-coveted topics.

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#20

TRAILER HOUSES AND VIDEO GAMES

I put these two together because they are niche categories that both require superior sound design skills. Also because the methods for getting trailer and video game placements tend to differ a little bit from sync companies that push and pitch their represented tracks across TV, film and advertising.

Video games don't pay performance royalties because the use is not public, so you typically will only get an up-front licensing fee as compensation. And in most cases, you'll have to connect directly to the video game developers for the opportunity.

With trailer houses, the up-front money can be significant (upwards of \$10k - \$25k). Go to YouTube and watch a few movie trailers...you'll notice a trend in the music. Huge cinematic hits, a lot of swells and FX with hybrid orchestral elements that build in intensity. This is pretty much all that trailer houses do, so make sure your production is on-point and that you actually compose trailer style music before reaching out to them.



#21



YOUTUBE MONETIZATION

Requires a certain amount of watch time on your channel to enable monetization. Running successful YouTube channels requires a lot of time and dedication, and obviously requires content on a consistent basis. It can be a great vehicle for your music career, depending on your content you may be able to work with tech companies and get paid to test and review gear. It can open up opportunities and get a lot of eyes and ears on you and your music. But you may find yourself dedicating all your time to YouTube and making a lot less music. Always be realistic with yourself about the amount of time and energy you have to focus on your most important goals and endeavors. Multiple income streams, yes - but you can't have your hands in every single cookie jar. Choose your hustles wisely.

25 INCOME STREAMS FOR INDIE ARTISTS AND PRODUCERS

#22

MERCH

You can use a print-on-demand website like Printful or Printify to offer merch to fans and customers without having to buy and ship physical goods. If you have a following, whether that is fans of your music, a YouTube audience or engaged IG/TikTok followers, merch can be another mostly-automated income stream for you to capitalize on.

Make sure not to overdo it. A catchy slogan works best because you can sell the message rather than expecting people to rock your brand/artist logo (unless the logo is undeniably dope). Keep the text design simple (readable) and choose the higher quality material for clothing so the goods don't feel cheap.

Order a few different items for yourself/friends and rock the gear in your social media videos. Link the merch in the YouTube description and on your linktree, but don't act overly salesy. Casually mention where they can get the merch and that it is a great way to support you. Way better than the 1/3 of a cent you earn when they stream your song on Spotify.

Great merch will sell itself if you get the right eyes on it.

#23

FAN MEMBERSHIPS

This is another music income stream that is definitely not for everyone. Platforms like Patreon allow you to sell fan memberships and offer perks to the subscribers. There are usually low (\$1-5/month), medium (\$10-20/month) and premium tiers with increasing perks for supporters.

You definitely have to be creative and provide ongoing value for this to work. It may involve early access for fans to your releases, exclusive drops, 1-1 fan interactions (think crowdfunding perks), or you can offer training/advice/access, to whatever unique things and value that you (and only you) can provide. Be creative!

25 INCOME STREAMS FOR INDIE ARTISTS AND PRODUCERS

#24

CROWDFUNDING

Crowdfunding an album project or tour isn't for everyone, and you will need to have some built in network of support (fans) to be the early backers of your crowdfunding project to get the ball rolling. Then, you will need a dedicated and well thought-out promo plan to get you the rest of the way.

I've never done one of these myself but I witnessed some close friends fund a Southeast Asia tour with a crowdfunding project.

Pro Tip: make sure you have at least one top-tier offering that will cover the bulk of needed funds, that some angel investor can save the day with. An intimate and exclusive live performance is always a great prize to dangle for your top-tier supporters.

#25

PLAYLIST CURATION

AKA TRICKING PEOPLE INTO SAVING YOUR SONG

Playlist curation is less of an 'income stream' than it is a promo strategy to get more streams, saves and follows on Spotify.

It's a long slow burn, requires top notch curation and an ad budget, which will likely offset any streaming income it generates.

Some playlists do charge for inclusion, but that is technically payola and against Spotify's T&Cs. Basically, you run ads to a very targeted playlist in your niche, where your own songs are heavily featured and no other artists have more than one song on the playlist. When it gets enough followers, you can get the playlist included on playlist pitching forums like Daily Playlists or Soundplate. These sites have gates set up to automatically follow your playlist and profile, and like your song to submit to the playlist. It boosts you with the algorithm and can be great for promoting new releasing and getting your music to trigger algorithmic playlists. If done right, it can have a long-term snowball effect for exposure to your music.

25 INCOME STREAMS FOR INDIE ARTISTS AND PRODUCERS

TO AI OR NOT TO AI?

THAT IS A LEGIT QUESTION

I saved the worst for last. More than likely, your music has already been used against your consent to train some AI model, and the tech bros ain't paying you for it, either. I was recently offered a price-per-track fee to include my music in some AI training, but I declined for ethical reasons.

Fully generated AI music can't be copyrighted, and music sups don't want to use AI music because future legislation involving AI could cause serious problems down the road. It is not worth trying to pitch AI-generated music for sync deals.

Stick to using AI as a tool to speed up tedious tasks in your production chain (AI mixing plug-ins, album art generation, research, metadata, press writing, etc.). Don't worry about AI "taking your job". It will replace some consumer-level creative projects for freelancers, but AI cannot accurately replicate the human touch that gives art its soul. AI art keeps getting better, yet people already seem to be sick of it. The cheapening of artistic work by AI makes hand-crafted human art more valuable.

Don't let the tech scare you. Keep creating and keep sharing your unique talents to the world through music. There will always be some new piece of tech that threatens to shake up industries and consumer habits. Art and music manage to survive every iteration of human evolution.

I've read a few eBooks that were clearly written by AI and it was all nonsensical trash. **I typed out every single word in this guide** and the info/insights come from me and my experience, not scraped from the unfact-checked internet at large. Thank you for reading! The next few pages contain links to tools, resources and companies mentioned in the guide.

RESOURCES & LINKS

DISTRIBUTORS

<https://amuse.io>

<https://cdbaby.com/>

<https://unitedmasters.com/>

ROYALTY COLLECTION

PERFORMING RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

<https://bmi.com>

<https://ascap.com>

SONGTRUST | Save \$10

<https://rebrand.ly/SongtrustSave10>

THE MLC

<https://www.themlc.com/>

SOUNDEXCHANGE

<https://www.soundexchange.com/>

LIME BLUE MUSIC

<https://www.limebluemusic.com/>

MORE LINKS

DISCO (sync pitching platform)

<https://rebrand.ly/DiscoDC>

SOUNDREEF (overhead radio)

<https://www.soundreef.com/en/>

IDENTIFY (Content ID)

<https://rebrand.ly/JoinIdentify>

INDAOT (Best Beat Store Builder)

<https://rebrand.ly/INADOT>

BANDCAMP (direct-to-fan)

<https://bandcamp.com/>

SELL MERCH

<https://www.printful.com/>

FAN MEMBERSHIPS

<https://www.patreon.com/>